

(22)

THE
B A L L A D
INTITUL'D, THE
S U B S C R I B E R S
C E N S U R E D
AT A
C O N F E R E N C E;
Communicated in a
L E T T E R
To H. L. Esq;



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THE
 BALLAD
 INTITUL'D, THE
 Subscribers Censured, &c.

SIR,



N Compliance with your Request,
 I here send you an Account of an
 Evening-Conference of Gentle-
 men, where I was present, which
 I spoke of when I waited on you
 last, concerning a late Ballad, inti-
 tuled, *The Subscribers*, that is, those
 Dissenting Ministers, who not suspected of Ariani-
 zing Principles, underwrit *Their Belief of Christ's*
Divinity, as it is express'd in the Articles of the
Church

Church of England, and the Assembly's Catechism; and it is from meer Defect of Wit and not of Malice, that those Reverend Persons have not received the least Loss of Honour and Esteem from this worthless Performance.

The Gentlemen, who shall go by the Names of *Freeman, Bernard and Thompson*, and my self, being met, little Discourse pass'd, before the Conversation turn'd upon the Subject I have mentioned, when Mr. *Freeman* thus express'd himself.

The highest Example of wanton Profaneness and intrepid Impiety is given by those insolent Atheists and scoffing Infidels, who presume to expose by Jests and Railery the Doctrines of the Existence of God, the Resurrection and a coming State of Immortality, which justly moves the Resentment and Detestation of every sober Hearer, who cannot bear the Conversation, where such abandon'd Persons deride all Things sacred, and spitefully ridicule all Reveal'd Religion. And tho' it is not a Crime of the same Degree, yet is it not one of the same impious Nature to depreteiate and disgrace the chief Principle of Christian Faith, by treating of it in a light and unworthy Manner, and making Revelation cheap and vile in the Eyes of the People ?

If

If it be said that the Author did not intend such an Event, and that he wounded the Christian Institution thro' Inadvertency ; I must reply, that he can scarcely be endowed with common Sense, that could not discern that whoever treats of divine Mysteries in the Way proper to the Buffoon and Ballad-Maker, and brings down sublime and important Subjects into doggrel Verse, with scoffing Airs and petulant Levity, which thus may sometime become the Diversion of the Mob, and the Song of the Drunkard, does certainly abuse his Parts, and prostitute his Pen to unworthy and profane Purposes ; for what is this, but to throw Dishonour and Contempt upon Sacred and Divine Things, and to expose Religion in an Antick and sordid Dress, to the Scorn and Laughter of Spectators ? Such Performances have a natural Tendency to sink the Esteem and Veneration due to great and sacred Subjects, and lay them open to the sneering Libertine ; such weak and ignorant, tho' perhaps not ill-meaning Men, who are of a slow and torpid Complexion, and have not the least Talent for Mirth and fine Satyr, should be admonish'd and restrained by their Neighbours, who have Interest in them, from Writing in the facetious Manner, and be made acquainted that their Lightness and Pleasantry, which is very awkward, and wonderfully unbecoming a serious Person, will hurt others, and deeply wound their own Reputation. But above all Things they should be entreated with the utmost Importance

not

not to meddle with the Art of making Songs; for Poetry is an edg'd Tool that should not be trusted in the Hand of two Sorts of Men, that I forbear to name. Upon the whole, I am tempted to believe that some Atheist in Masquerade, or some Infidel personating a Christian, has to expose divine Revelation, and debase the Dignity, and weaken the Interest of Religion in the Minds of Men, published this scurrilous Invective.

Mr. *F*----- here pausing, Mr. *B*----- thus address'd him----Sir, I must crave Leave to dissent from what you said last. I acknowledge that the scurrilous Ballad, the Subject we are upon, for what Purpose soever it was intended, is adapted to diminish the Honour and Reverence due to divine and sacred Things: But then I cannot agree that it is probable it should be the Performance of one that is irreligious in Principle, or of a scoffing Libertine; for that Sort of Men, how much soever I abhor their Impiety, to give them their due, are in some Degree Men of Wit and Parts, which I think appears in their Unchristian Writings, when they undertake either to argue or be merry: But our Author is quite the Reverse to this. Instead of having a facetious and pleasant Genius, he seems to have a Complexion entirely phlegmatick, without the least Mixture of Spirit, or so much as any insipid Pert-
ness,

ness, or impertinent Vivacity. This Poet appears to be so fortified by Nature, which has encompassed his Understanding with such impenetrable Darkness, and so compleatly guarded all the Passes that lead to it, that to all the Approaches of Sense and Reason he is altogether inaccessible. This is evidently so much his native Temperament, that had he from his Infancy been fed, instead of Milk, with the Juice of a whole Field of the strongest Poppies, it would have given no Addition to his Original sleepy Disposition. This however, I do not mention as his Fault, but Misfortune, that deserves Compassion, not Reproach: But then, for such a Man to affect fine Railery and Satyr, to lay about him like a furious distempered Man in the dark, with Labels and defamatory Invectives, is something very shocking, and by all serious Persons, who have a Taste of Virtue and good Manners, must be justly censured as highly criminal. It is unaccountable by what Crack the Fancy of being a Wit and an Affection of writing an ingenious Ballad, should get into a Head so uncapable of either. A masterly Performance of the Ballad-kind, is a very difficult Task, in which but few Men have succeeded, and requires other-guests Qualifications than our low and groveling Writer is Master of, who seems fitter for a Ballad-Singer than a Ballad-Maker. This poor Man seems to be drawn in to compose Sonnets, by imagining that Party Rage, and a Spirit of Revenge, with a miserable Talent of

Rhyming will do as well as native Fire, and a Genius turn'd for Poetry. Thus the unhappy Man was carried away with the fatal Delusion, obey'd a false Instinct, and yielded to the Power of a spleen-tick impulsive Flatus. It is not for every gross and lubberly Writer to pretend to mount and manage *Pegasus* without a Bridle ; when he bestrides the Beast he will make a very ungraceful Figure, and look more like drowsy *Silenus*, or *Bacchus* upon a Tun, than a fine Poet on Horse-back. I imagine that having heard that stew'd Prunes are very good for a Comick Poet, and having try'd them in vain upon his sturdy Constitution, and afterwards being inform'd that Mr. *Bays* used to prepare himself by Steel Medicines for any great Poetical Undertaking, our forgetful Author mistook, and went thro' a Course of Lead ; by which Means however he has reach'd to so great Perfection, that *Barins* and *Mavins*, famous Roman Poets in the *Augustan* Age, as well as our modern *Macfleckno* and *Quarles*, must be allowed to be out-rivall'd by our Author ; and *Withers*, were he alive, *Withers* himself being Judge, must have yielded to this superiour Genius. 'Tis difficult to believe that any Person ever so well qualified, should by the Strength of his own Endowments, without considerable Assistance, express in so few Lines such inimitable Nonsense and exquisite Incapacity ; and therefore I cannot but think he had many Helps from Writers of his own Rank, to enable

ble him to finish such a surprising Production, which is so perfect in its Kind, that my Opinion is, that tho' he should still write on, he will never outdo this Performance, nor that any of his future Labours will eclipse the Glory of this wonderful Ballad.----- Here Mr. B----- stopp'd.

Mr. T----n took up the Discourse and said, I am of Mr. Fr----'s Opinion, being abundantly satisfied, that an important Article of Religion and Doctrines, that immediately concern eternal Salvation treated in a ludicrous, scoffing and scurrilous Manner, must affront Revelation, and cannot but be very ungrateful to a Christian Ear: And I likewise agree with Mr. B---- that the Author is an unparallel'd Example of Weakness and Stupidity. But I acknowledge I cannot give into Mr. B----'s Sentiment, that he will never be able to exceed this Writing; for as I believe that the Man being pleas'd in himself, and having often perused his own Performance, with the Pleasure and Self-Admiration of an Author, and being complemented by his Friends, all great Judges and Criticks especially in Poetry, and assur'd that he has succeeded in Verse to that Degree, that in a Sheet or two of Rhimes he has fully answered all the Arguments of the Subscribers, and utterly confounded all their Adherents, that he will certainly

write on, tho' in Defiance of Nature, and the strongest Anti-genius that ever yet appeared; so I engage for him that he shall still write worse and worse, till he brings his Pen into the greatest Contempt. Men should consider their Talents before they adventure upon the nice Province of Poetry fabled. *Parnassus* is too steep and high for every bold Pretender, tho' ever so robust and athletick, to climb up; but the gross and pursy must soon be out of Breath, and give over. Many spontaneous Springs and Rivers were reputed to favour and assist the Sons of the singing Art: But Fame, as far as I know, never erected in any Country a happy Pump, where Drudges and Labourers by the meer Dint of Sweat and Toil, might draw up Supplies of tuneful Rapture and impulsive Energy; had I heard of any such desireable Machine, I would advise our Ballad-Maker to have Recourse to it for his future Service. I cannot however but commend one great Beauty in this Writing, that is, that he all along supports an equal and uniform Character, and a Stile always the same, without ever going astray from his heavy Road, and without once stumbling upon Wit, or blundering into Sense. But the worst of it is, that when the Fancy of being a Wit and a Poet, gets Possession of any Man's Brain, the Distemper is generally incurable, and the deluded Rhimer still desparately charges his Foes without Fear or Wit, till, as I said before, he sinks into Contempt, and be-

comes
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comes a standing Jeſt ; and when the unruly wing'd Steed has thrown him, and he lyes sprawling ignominiously in the Dust, he will ſtill value and enjoy his Talents, and whilſt he is the Object of his Neighbours Deriſion, he will ſtill be well pleas'd with himſelf, and take their Laughter for Applauſe : Which was the Caſe of a ſtupid French Advocate, that having tired the Court with a tedious and ſenſeless Harangue, was heard to ſay often whilſt he was going out of Court, ſo highly he was ſatisfied with his miſerable Eloquence, *Not unto us, not unto us*— Strange, that a Man ſhould ſo miſtake his Faculties ! If our Ballad-Maker were an able-body'd Man, and his Limbs were ſinewy and ſtrong, as his Understanding is impotent and weak, he might be fit for the Labour of the Fields, tho' unapt for that of the Closet ; he might handle a Goad, tho' not a Pen ; with the firſt he might prick and wound, but with the laſt he never can.

When I had perus'd this Writing more than once, I began to conſider to what Denomination of Men the Author could belong, and I found it much more eaſy to diſcover thoſe Classes of which he is not, than that of which he is a Member : It preſently appear'd to me, without the leaſt Diſſidence or Hesitation, that he could by no Means be a Gentleman ; for a Gentleman is a Person of good Breeding, one that

that converses with Persons of his own Character, one of polite and elegant Manners, that abhors Rudeness, Scurrillity and Defamation, he praises and commends with Decency, contradicts and opposes with Temper, and when he meddles with Satyr, he does it with ingenuous and genteel Raillery; he does not like our rustick Author, come on with his Club to knock you down, nor run upon you with open Mouth directly to fasten upon your Throat; but with oblique Expression, and glancing Turns of Wit attacks his Opposer, and pleases even when he wounds. Upon this Reflection I was entirely satisfied that our *Ballad-maker* was no Gentleman, who thro' all his silly and spiteful Paper appears the Reverse of this Character. Nor can I imagine that this Ballad is the Production of a Man in Holy Orders, for it cannot be supposed that he would affront Religion, by making the venerable Mysteries of it the Subject of Lampoon and Buffoonry, that he would ever attempt to treat the great Articles of Christian Belief in Raillery and Ridicule. Was it ever known that Divines did once manage sublime and controverted Doctrines in scurrillous and defamatory Ballads, and by throwing against their Adversaries Dirt and Scandal in vulgar petulant Rhimes, and thereby expose their Religion to Contempt, wound the Interest and Honour of their Profession, and help to pull down their own Altars? Can it be thought that a grave Divine could be composing trifling and sple-
netick

netick Ballads one Day, to blacken and dishonour his Brethren, and mount the Pulpit with solemn Airs the next, to teach the People Christian Charity, and exhort them to speak Evil of no Man? If it be possible for a Clergy-man to act in a Way so unworthy of his venerable Profession, he must betray the Interest of it, and the Consequence must be, that the Hot and Heavy will cleave as fast to him as his indelible Character.

But to put it beyond all Doubt that that this Song was not composed by any Reverend Divine, it should be considered that no Man adorn'd with that sacred Character, and at the same Time endowed with the least Principle of Piety, Veneration for Religion, or any Degree of Modesty and common Decency, would profane the holy and awful Name of God, in a ludicrous and paultry Ballad, as this Writer has done more than once. It is inconsistent with Reason and Christian Charity, to believe that a Divine, a Teacher of Piety and Virtue, can employ his Pen to quite opposite Purposes, and be so abandon'd to Resentment and Revenge, and transported so far with Polemical Heat and Fury as to engage his Pen in a Work so unworthy of his high Profession, while he writes or sings uncharitable and scandalous Ballads over-night, and perhaps administers the Holy Sacrament the next Day; this being altogether

together incredible; our Author, whatever some Men may suggest, cannot be rank'd among Persons in sacred Orders: If such a Prodigy can be found in Nature, he must be look'd upon as a Man destitute as well of Religion, as Moral Virtue, he must be an Animal without Reflection and Humanity, and whose Heart is as hard as his Head is weak.

Sometimes I was inclin'd to think that our worshipful Author was one of the Wits of *Grub-Street*; sometimes that he was one of the ingenuots Fraternity that write Prologues to the Dramatick Entertainments of *Bartholomew-Fair*; and sometimes that he was one of the handycraft mechanical Labourers that write in a Garret to the Bookseller's Shop for their Dinner, of whom you may bespeak a Treatise of any Sort, an Answer, Reply or Rejoynder, as Mercers bespeak Silks in *Spittle-Fields*: But when I reflected that the two first were Wits in their Way, and that the last had some Merit and Ability in Writing, for otherwise they would not be employed by the Booksellers, who very well understand their Interest, I was well assured that the Composer of this Ballad could not belong to any of the three Classes abovemention'd-----

Here

Here Mr. *Fr-----n* interposd, and said, You have justly excluded our Writer from the Rank of Gentlemen, and the Profession of a Divine, as well as from the other Sorts of Men that have some Wit and Sense whom you have named; now give me Leave to gues at what he is, as you have shewn what he is not: If he be not what I suspected before, an irreligious Person, then in my Opinion, it is most likely that some morose half Scholar, that has Ill-Will both to Subscribers and Non-Subscribers, has in publishing this Paper acted the Part of an Incendiary, to exasperate and enflame them one against another, who now without Doubt laughs in himself, to see the Design so well succeed-----

Mr. *B-----d* reply'd, I am rather of Opinion that he belongs to the celebrated Colledge near *London-Wall*, where imaginary Princes, Heroes and Poets enjoy themselves, and despise the World; where may be had all Sorts of extraordinary Writing, excellent and inimitable Declarations for Pretenders, as well as admirable Ballads, and all Kinds of doggrel Verse, to be used in Disputation by polemical Divines; and by all that study *Alge-*

bra, or are deeply engaged in metaphysical Controversies-----

Then Mr. T----- delivered his Opinion-----

Sir, I shall readily be of your Judgment, with one Limitation; There are two Sorts of Members of that Society; one has Fire and Imagination exalted above a regular and healthful Complexion, who rave with immoderate Enthusiasm; the other is a sluggish, spiritless and melancholy Sort: Now if you mean that our Author may probably be of this low and dull Class, I shall not contend, but think your Conjecture well grounded, but I must be excused from ranking him with the other elevated Kind; for he is so far from having their tow'ring Fancy, that he has no Spirit or Fire at all, but is quite cold and insipid.

Sir, All this Time I continued silent, but now being prest by the Company to speak my Thoughts, I express'd my self thus, and declared, that tho' the Gentlemen had censured the Author of the Ballad very sharply, yet I thought they had done it justly: And I believe, Sir, that neither you, nor any serious Reader, no, not

not of his own Party, will think that this trifling and ill-natur'd Writer deserves a Chas-tisement less severe. For this Race of scribbling Incendiaries are insufferable in a Christian Nation; and notwithstanding this Infect Author is short-liv'd, and must soon dye for Want of Native Fire, and intrinsick Principles to support him, and so might be left to sink of himself into Obscurity; yet you will judge it reasonable that such a Person should be expos'd, to discourage others from such Attempts for the future, which if not prevented, will not only encourage his rude and splenetick Invectives, but draw in others to think they shall be able to write fine Things, without either Sense, Pleasantry or Humour; and if this happens among Men of a serious and sober Character, what a Wound must it give to the Religion they profess.

But if the Combatants on the *Arian* Side, notwithstanding they have been discomfited and routed so often, will as often rally their beaten Forces, and return to the Field: If they will obstinately persevere, and desperately try their Fortune again, so disarm'd and miserably wounded as they are; let them not adjourn the Controversy from the Schools

and the Pulpit, to the publick Corners of the Streets, with Design to decide a great Point of Divinity, by low Lampoons and spiteful spiritless Ballads; let them not stain themselves by personal Reflections, but behave with that Decency, Gravity and serious Spirit, as becomes the Dignity and Importance of their Divine Subject; and it is to be hoped that they will not espouse nor imitate the Author of this pecculant and profane Song, of which we have been discoursing; for should they do that, it will plainly appear that they have not the least Taste of elegant Writing or polite Manners, nor any Judgement to distinguish between Right and Wrong, but likewise must tell the World that they feel very little Concern for the Interests of Religion or their own Honour, which must both suffer by such angry contumelious Writings. But as to our Poet, he seems to be one of those, who are not able to discern when they are answered; and as he appears to be right bred, and to have true *Arian* Blood in his Veins, I must despair of him, he will never forbear Hostilities; but like Animals of the fiercest Kind, when once he fastens upon an Adversary, though he should be mangled and cut to Pieces, he will still keep fast his Hold.

But

But for others not so far infected with Annoyed Opinions, and who are Masters of more Temper and Judgment, it is to be hop'd that after such fierce Contentions, and the Effusion of so much Christian Charity, they will think it fit to put up the destructive Pen, and sincerely endeavour to heal, and not enrage the Wounds they have given to Religion and the Peace of the People ?

I am past Doubt, Sir, that a Gentleman of your good Taste and Judgement, that has always express'd such a just Concern for the Support of Religion and Virtue, and always promoted the Interests of worthy Divines, and protected their Credit and Esteem, will be astonished when I tell you that many of that Sacred Order have not only read with Pleasure this scandalous Ballad, but have spoken of it, with Approbation and Honour, as I am well informed they have done; and therefore I believe that you will conclude with me, that if this foolish Paper was not the Performance of a Person in Holy Orders, yet those Divines that take Pleasure, and encourage others to do the same, do justly deserve the sharp Censure which Mr. Thompson in this Conference

ference bestows upon any Minister of the Gospel, that could be supposed to be the Author of this Libel: And is it not plain, Sir, that if Men of the Sacerdotal Function, should not condemn, and much more if they espouse and applaud such a Writing, they must share the Guilt, and partake of the Infamy and Folly of the Performance? And therefore it is very wonderful that any Teachers of Christian Religion should so far fally their sacred Character, as to commend and patronize such an idle and profane Paper.

Thus, Sir, I have acquitted my self of the Province you enjoyn'd me, and shall add no more than this, That it is a very melancholy Reflection that we are fallen into so degenerate an Age, in which there are found even among those who would be unwilling not to be thought sober and religious, Men that can be contented to see the Mysteries of the Christian Religion, and the Teachers of it, become the Subject of impious Mirth in Songs and Ballads.

I am, Sir, with great Respect,

Your most obedient Humble Servant,

Philemon Collier.

